

University of Kentucky
Retention and Student Success
Goals and Major Activities 2007-2010

In early fall 2007, Provost Kumble R. Subbaswamy declared war on attrition. The UK first year student retention rate (persistence in first- to second-year enrollment) evidenced little change over the past decade, ranging from 77-81%. The UK graduation rate (incoming full-time first-year students who graduate within six years) hovers at 60% -- 16 points below the median for UK's aspiration benchmark institutions. Deans, Provost Staff, faculty, and professional staff across the University are challenged to improve UK's first-year retention rate and six-year graduation rate dramatically. The UK Top 20 Business Plan proposes to matriculate 90% of the first-year class to their second year and achieve a 72% graduation rate by 2020.

The University has been working for more than a decade to increase undergraduate education efforts in first year student success as well as personalized academic intervention for students who experience academic difficulty at UK. Programs such as the Discovery Seminar Program (www.uky.edu/AS/Discovery), Living-Learning Communities (www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/ResidenceLife/livingLearning.html), "The Study" peer tutoring and academic consulting (www.uky.edu/UGS/study), UK101 Freshman Seminar (www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/NewStudentPrograms/UK101) and a Common Reading Experience (www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/NewStudentPrograms/CommonReading), K-Week and Student Induction Ceremony (www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/KWeek) are just a few University-wide initiatives that have been implemented to enhance the first-year experience. However, the sophomore year experience and upperclassmen experiences are just as critical to improving student persistence, and the University is committed to bolstering critical programs such as Undergraduate Research (www.uky.edu/EUREKA), Robinson Scholars (www.uky.edu/RobinsonScholars) and AMSTEMM (www.uky.edu/AMSTEMM) which focus on the successful progress of our students from eastern Kentucky, and increasing faculty leadership in creating opportunities for experiential education and service learning. A task force appointed by the Provost in 2007 to study issues pertaining to retention and graduation concluded their report with the following aspirations in 2007 to guide units and individuals in responding to the Provost's War on Attrition:

1. Nurture high expectations for the rigor and quality of the undergraduate experience.
2. Communicate strong institutional commitment to student learning.
3. Construct educational communities that engage students in learning.
4. Organize learning opportunities in and out of class to maximize student involvement.
5. Increase time that students spend on activities that impact student development.
6. Assist students in connecting and identifying with the University.
7. Increase frequency and improve quality of student interactions with faculty and staff.
8. Promote active learning and regular, prompt feedback.
9. Nurture respect, inclusivity and interaction among diverse groups.

At the University of Kentucky undergraduate student success is critical to the strategic efforts of all the undergraduate colleges and of all the administrative support units, especially including those in the three divisions of Enrollment Management, Student Affairs and Undergraduate Education. The leadership of these three divisions together with the Vice-President of Institutional Research comprise the Provost's Retention Workgroup, which now meets monthly to:

- monitor current retention and graduation rate data of students at the University of Kentucky as well as any research and assessment activities that contribute to campus goals;
- identify current student success programs and assessment initiatives occurring on campus;
- identify best practices and outstanding student success programs at other institutions and considers their application potential at UK;
- makes recommendations to the Provost concerning ways to increase student learning, success, satisfaction and persistence at UK; and,
- appoints task forces to develop (and, when appropriate, implement) programmatic initiatives that enhance student success at UK.

In January 2008, the Office of Retention and Student Success was created as an administrative unit in the Office of Undergraduate Education. The mission of this unit is to develop, plan, coordinate and administer strategic retention communication campaigns that significantly improve the academic and social quality of the undergraduate college experience. The staff of the office includes a Director, an Academic Alert clerk, a graduate research assistant and an Online Community Manager. The staff are dedicated to an everyday engagement with the campus-wide commitment to the Provost's "War on Attrition," in developing comprehensive programs to identify at-risk students and supporting the staff and faculty who deliver the appropriate support these students need to succeed.

The Retention and Student Success (R&SS) staff work primarily with admissions and enrollment staff, academic advisors, residence hall directors and student support staff as well as with faculty and students to deploy strategic programs such as:

- UK Academic Readiness Program (ARP): The University began a new program for incoming freshmen whose standardized test scores are below the state cut-offs for placement (starting with the incoming 2009 cohort). The ARP provides personalized services for selected first-year students working to improve their basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. Working with the academic advising staff in the students' colleges, the Office of Retention and Student Success provides and tracks:
 1. COMPASS Placement Testing specific to each student's academic needs;
 2. Free Online Tutoring (in PLATO) supported by a subject matter expert;
 3. Learning communities (both virtual in "The Big Blue Network" and face-to-face) where a student can find close-knit and caring support to guide them through their first semester at UK;

4. Peer Tutoring and Study Smarter Seminars offered by the Office of Academic Enhancement;
 5. Supplemental instruction in certain courses that best match each student's preferred course of study (one credit hour reading labs and writing workshops in the fall and an intensive learning clinic in the spring); and,
 6. Developmental education in mathematics (UK has signed a dual enrollment agreement with Bluegrass Community and Technical College, and thus is phasing out the MA108R Intermediate Algebra course so that by Fall 2010, all developmental education of UK students will be handled by BCTC).
- Academic Alert System (AAS) - The Academic Alert System supports student success efforts by providing, centrally, a hub of communication for intervention with students demonstrating at-risk behavior (e.g., pattern of poor attendance, low grades on assignments, disruptive behavior in class). Teaching faculty and staff submit individual alerts or spreadsheets to R&SS who then tracks and sends out to the appropriate college's AAS liaisons the alerts that were submitted. In addition, the Office of Residence Life or the Committee on Students of Concern may be contacted about an alert. Midterm grades (required of all undergraduate courses as of Fall 2007) are scanned for D, E, F grades and these are also submitted as academic alerts. Academic advising staff have been trained to communicate with students upon receiving the alerts and establish a formal plan of action when appropriate. R&SS partners with the Office of Institutional Research to determine the depth and breadth of usage of the AAS by teaching faculty, staff and graduate students at the end of each academic semester. Courses under scrutiny for high DEW rates and/or program "gatekeeper" status are also under analysis for use of AAS. The R&SS goal is to increase awareness of and usage rates by instructors and academic advising staff each semester.
 - Hobsons EMT Retain communications software - This software is designed to assist UK administrative staff and faculty in collaboratively identifying at risk students - acting as a hub for accessing key information and for communications with specific students to achieve institutional retention objectives. The UK instance of Hobsons EMT test site was set up January 22, 2008; a successful, targeted implementation rolled out in March 2008 with *ad hoc* communications jobs established based on availability of appropriate data and willingness of University partner units to test the system. Initial data transfer was substantial with roughly 70,000 student entries. The Hobsons VIP portal for incoming freshmen considered by the University to be candidates for the Academic Readiness Program during Spring and Summer 2009 was the first implementation of direct use of the Hobsons database by end-users. As select populations enter the University academic system and need to be tracked for strategic intervention activities and communications, e.g., international students, adult learners, veterans, first-generation-college-going students, Project Graduate candidates, the sponsoring student support unit directs the design and assessment of the use of Hobsons EMT Retain for emails, text messaging, surveys, polls and telephone banks.
 - Supporting Timeliness toward Graduation and Helping to Re-recruit Non-Enrolled Students in Official Graduation Cohorts - partnering with colleges and Enrollment Management staff to communicate with students in UK's official cohorts who have dropped behind, "stopped out" or left the University. The first attempt at this effort was in the spring of 2008 to support the work focused on the undergraduate students in the 2002 cohort (first- to second-year retention rate at 68.2% was below the UK average). Through collaborative efforts, the staff worked to improve the estimated 57.9% graduation rate and reached a number closer to the 60% mark

that is the UK average graduation rate. The latest effort was in the “re-recruitment campaign for the 2008 cohort” – starting in the fall of 2008, tracking and communicating with those incoming freshmen who dropped out in their first semester and/or didn’t priority register for Spring or Fall 2009. UK staff generated ideas for taking down the barriers and offering something these students might find particularly valuable, e.g., access to a coveted residence hall assignment, match with a peer mentor interested in first-year experience bridge to second-year, match with a research professor in the major, and personal financial aid counseling. The University leadership plans to develop a new University-wide policy and accompanying survey for all students who plan to withdraw completely from the University. The survey will be college-based in terms of any plans for re-enrollment but critical for determining personalized strategies for cohort status in the last few years of the six-year graduation cycle.

- The Big Blue Network (TBBN): The Office of Undergraduate Education coordinates an online social network designed exclusively for members of the University of Kentucky's campus family. The goal of the network is to build real connections between students, and between students and the University in a safe and private space to interact. Students will learn from each other and assigned peer mentors how best to make the most of their University of Kentucky experience. UK faculty and staff from the departments and colleges will also participate in communicating about and fine-tuning expectations about students' majors. The online community members can share content between Big Blue Network and their existing Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Second Life, Twitter, etc. accounts. Members can update their personal status, send instant messages, post pictures and videos on both their existing social networking sites AND Big Blue Network.

The Office of Retention and Student Success relies on timely data and cross-unit collaborations to do its work. Yet, it cannot serve as the “answer” to the Provost’s call for change. The faculty of the University of Kentucky are committed to improving the undergraduate students’ rates of persistence and timely graduation. This is the primary reason for the successful passage of the new General Education Curriculum design framework and learning outcomes in 2008-09. The first sixty courses developed within the new framework and adhering to the new Gen Ed rubrics will be approved and piloted in the next two years. The faculty leadership in the University’s retention initiative has been crucial to its success.